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Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 62/122, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a programme of educational outreach to mobilize, inter alia, educational institutions and civil society on the subject of remembering the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

Through its educational outreach programme, the Department of Public Information seeks to address the lack of knowledge about the slave trade and to encourage broad study and discussion of the topic. To that end, the Department has developed a diverse educational outreach strategy to increase the awareness of and to educate present and future generations about the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the 400-year slave trade and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice.

The Department's multi-platform strategy comprises a series of activities, which began on the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, includes follow-up activities throughout the year and has, as its core, an educational programme for intermediate and high school students that can be used at any time during the school year and which builds on the Slave Route Project developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

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I. Introduction

1. On 17 December 2007, the General Assembly, by its resolution 62/122, designated 25 March as the annual International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, beginning in 2008.

2. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to collaborate with and build upon the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including its Slave Route Project, in establishing a programme of educational outreach to mobilize educational institutions, civil society and others on the subject and to report to it at its sixty-third session on the establishment and implementation of the programme.

3. The present report outlines the programme of activities undertaken following the adoption of the resolution.

II. Background

4. The transatlantic slave trade played a major part in world history, yet little is known about the 400-year long slave trade or its lasting consequences throughout the world, including the important contributions made by slaves to the building of societies in the lands of their enslavement. This lack of information about the history of the trade extends even to some of the descendants of the enslaved peoples and to other populations, in particular those outside the areas directly involved in the trade in the Caribbean, Europe and the Americas.

5. A study of the lives of enslaved Africans in the Americas and the Caribbean reveals the capacity of human beings, even under dehumanizing conditions, to influence the societies in which they live. It shows some of the diverse ways in which people can confront and transcend oppression and offers examples of survival and growth in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

6. Against this background, the programme examines how the forced movement of African peoples across the Atlantic resulted in shifts in racial and cultural identity, racism, inequality and a marked decline in the African population. The transatlantic slave trade also had a significant economic and agricultural impact on European States and their colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean. The programme seeks to address the enforced acquiescence that pervaded the 400-year span of the slave trade and which is also present in modern forms of slavery, such as forced labour, human trafficking, child labour and child prostitution.

III. Goals

7. The mandate for establishing the outreach programme was assigned to the Department of Public Information, which defines its goals as follows:

(a) To impress upon civil society the importance and necessity of educating future generations about the causes, consequences and lessons of the slave trade and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice;

(b) To encourage educational institutions to incorporate into their academic programmes, curricula and discussions, the subject of slavery and the transatlantic

slave trade, the contributions made by enslaved Africans to civilization, the legacy of the slave trade on contemporary society and the dangers of racism and prejudice;

(c) To mobilize civil society to examine the links between the transatlantic slave trade and modern forms of slavery.

IV. Educational outreach programme

8. "Breaking the Silence on the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Lest We Forget", the theme of the programme of events organized by the Department of Public Information, highlights the main focus of the programme to shed light on the history of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which has largely been ignored; and to stimulate discussion and dialogue about the causes, consequences and legacy of the slave trade in order to create an understanding that would help prevent similar acts of racism infused with arrogance and prejudice from occurring in the future.

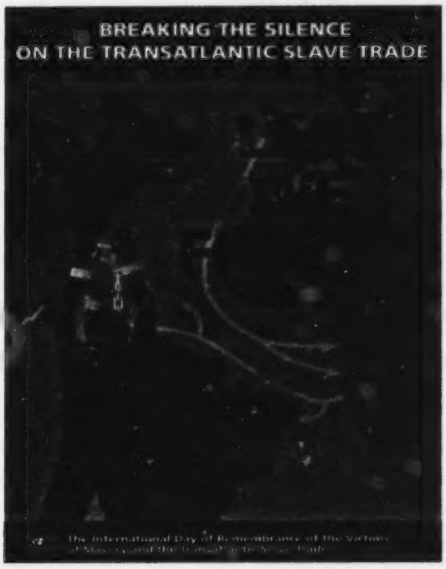
9. In planning the programme of outreach activities, the Department is pursuing both established and innovative methods to broaden its reach and deepen its impact. In addition to media interviews, press announcements, notes to correspondents and briefings to Member States, non-governmental organizations and youth groups, new technologies have also been employed to disseminate information about the slave trade.

10. The primary elements of the commemoration event included: a solemn remembrance on 25 March 2008, with a keynote speaker and African and Caribbean performers; related exhibits on various aspects of the issue; a panel discussion and briefing by experts for Member States and non-governmental partners; the world premiere of a new UNESCO documentary on the global slave trade; a videoconference to promote discussion on the issue among students in Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe; and the dissemination of relevant materials to the global network of United Nations information centres, services and offices. All of these activities were coordinated through a conscientious and targeted media outreach effort.

V. Activities

Honouring the victims of slavery and the slave trade

11. A number of events were held during the week of 25 March 2008 to launch the programme. In preparation, the Department of Public Information created a special logo and a commemorative poster to depict the theme "Breaking the Silence on the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Lest We Forget" (see below).



Solemn remembrance ceremony

12. The solemn remembrance ceremony began on the morning of 25 March 2008 with an event in the Economic and Social Council Chamber at Headquarters. The event was organized by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Ambassador's Caucus and the African Union.

13. The programme began with an African drumming ceremony. Statements were delivered by the Secretary-General, a representative of the President of the General Assembly and representatives of Member States. The keynote address was presented by Harry Belafonte, the renowned actor and musician, human rights activist and Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), who stated that, in order to avoid repeating the horrors of the past, it was vital that younger generations be informed and educated about the transatlantic slave trade. Slavery, he noted, still existed under new forms and names, including poverty:

> "Slavery has changed, people are not shackled anymore, but the mentality of slavery still exists in our society".

14. The observance, attended by delegates, representatives of non-governmental organizations, media, staff and the public, featured performances by drummers, dancers and singers from Guinea, Mali and Senegal, a poet from Liberia and a steel pan troupe from the Caribbean. The event, telecast live by United Nations Television and webcast globally, can be viewed at www.un.org/webcast.

Remembrance website

15. The Department established a website to facilitate global access to the commemorative activities. The website also provides educational resources on the transatlantic slave trade with links to lesson plans and curricula, teacher training materials, information materials, university programmes, museums, travelling exhibits and archived statements, speeches and videos of the events at Headquarters organized in connection with the outreach programme.

Bookstore launch

16. In connection with the remembrance ceremony, the United Nations bookstore hosted a "meet the author" event on 27 March featuring Professor Verene Shepherd of the Department of History of the University of the West Indies. A number of books on the transatlantic slave trade are now available in the bookstore, including United Nations publications, scholarly studies, fiction and poetry.

Fact sheet

17. The Department reissued a fact sheet on the slave trade, highlighting the background of this brutal economic system, and its legacy. The sheet describes how the trade was justified globally and identifies the countries along the triangular route, which started and ended in Europe, from where guns, alcohol and horses were exported to West Africa in exchange for enslaved Africans. Only one in six Africans survived the voyage across the Atlantic, known as the "Middle Passage". The survivors were sold in the Americas and the Caribbean where they produced the prized goods, including sugar, tobacco, cotton, rum and coffee, that were shipped to Europe.

Slave narrative on the Middle Passage

"The stench of the hold ... was so intolerable loathsome that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo was confined together it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated ... and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable, and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole scene of horror almost inconceivable."

The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African.
Written by himself, 1789.

Olaudah Equiano was born in Iboland, Nigeria, around 1745. At about the age of 14, he and his younger sister were kidnapped on the outskirts of the village by slave raiders. He was taken to the coast, sold to traders and placed on board a vessel bound for Barbados. For the better part of

his early life, he was enslaved in various English colonies, but finally found his freedom in England where he became a principal spokesman in the anti-slavery movement.

Exhibitions

18. In observance of the International Day of Remembrance, there was an exhibition in the Visitors' Lobby from 17 March to 22 April 2008. The exhibit was opened by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, after which statements were made by the Department's partners from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and Amistad America. The theme of the exhibit was echoed in the performances by a jazz violinist and a folk guitarist.

19. The exhibition consisted of two parts, "The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo" and "*Amistad*: The Story". The first segment comprised 52 narrative drawings from the book, "The Middle Passage", by the artist Tom Feelings. The drawings were mixed media works detailing the horror of the transportation of Africans from their old world of freedom to the new world of slavery. The exhibit also included three sculptures by the same artist.

20. The segment on the *Amistad* featured a scale model of the freedom schooner, the vessel on which 53 Africans mutinied in 1839. At the time of the exhibit, a full-scale replica of the ship was on a voyage retracing the triangular route, docking at the following former slave trading ports: Halifax, Canada; Liverpool and Bristol, United Kingdom; Lisbon; London; Freetown; Dakar; Praia, Cape Verde; Barbados; Puerto Rico; Bermuda; Charleston, United States of America; and New York City. Over the past 18 months, the *Amistad* has travelled a total of 14,000 miles, providing thousands of people with the chance to learn about the slave trade and the contributions of slaves to the countries where they were sent. Photos of the voyage were on display in the United Nations exhibit, and students on board the ship took part in a videoconference (see para. 22 below).

Briefing for non-governmental organizations and film premiere

21. On 27 March 2008, the Department organized a briefing for its partners in the community of non-governmental organizations in observance of the International Day, commencing with the premiere of the documentary "The Slave Route: A Global Vision". The producer of the film, Dr. Sheila Walker, presented little known facts about the slave trade and called for a rewriting of its history. Other speakers discussed global efforts to gain recognition for the tragedy and the legacy of slavery, past and present, as well as plans to combat racial discrimination worldwide.

Student videoconference

22. The Department, in collaboration with Amistad America, held a videoconference for students in observance of the International Day on 28 March. The conference linked students at sites in Oslo, Halifax, Bristol, Freetown, Praia, Castries, Saint Lucia, and Headquarters for a discussion of the reasons behind and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. Several students had previously participated in the UNESCO Slave Route Project; others, retracing the Middle Passage on board the *Amistad*, were linked via satellite to the videoconference.

Outreach by the United Nations information centres

23. The network of United Nations information centres, services and United Nations offices commemorated the International Day either individually or jointly with local civil society partners and Governments. The commemorative poster, "Breaking the Silence on the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Lest We Forget", was distributed throughout the network and a songwriting competition was launched.

24. The United Nations information centre in Port-of-Spain is participating in year-long activities emanating from the Trinidad and Tobago National Planning Committee to commemorate the slave trade. The centre provided resource materials and assistance for a full-page newspaper announcement published in three local dailies on 25 March and for an eight-page newspaper supplement, published on the same day in the *Trinidad and Tobago Express*, which contained essays by academics and advocates.

25. The United Nations information centre in Lagos launched a campaign to encourage schools to participate in the Department's songwriting competition on the subject of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. More than 25 entries were submitted to the centre. On 25 June 2008, the centre arranged a visit to the Heritage Museum in Badagry, where a curator provided a guided tour of the remains of a slave camp and slave market, and described the history of the slave trade to students and teachers from the Badagry Senior Secondary School.

Information outreach

26. As part of its outreach programme, the Department facilitated the live webcast of the 25 March solemn observance on the Internet. A recording by United Nations Television was made available through its UNIFEED programme to television stations worldwide. The Media Liaison and Accreditation Unit provided services to a number of journalists who covered the commemorative event. United Nations staff were kept informed through stories posted on i-Seek, which appeared on 20 and 25 March. In addition, the Department publicized the programmes in the daily *Journal of the United Nations*, at the noon briefing of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, in event calendars of New York-based print media and through its extensive e-mail alert services for United Nations accredited non-governmental organizations and subscribers to the United Nations News Centre. The Meetings Coverage Section issued press releases in English and French on the subject, including notes to correspondents and the message of the Secretary-General.

27. The *United Nations Chronicle* placed two articles relating to the commemoration at Headquarters on its website. Electronic alerts were also transmitted to Permanent Missions to the United Nations, offices and staff members as well as to subscribing non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and individuals.

28. United Nations Radio produced several documentaries and news magazine stories on the commemoration in English and Spanish. The English programmes included a 15-minute "Caribbean news magazine" and a story in the United Nations and Africa series, entitled "The United Nations Remembers the Victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade". United Nations Radio features in Spanish traced the issue of slavery in Latin America and focused on the commemoration at

Headquarters. United Nations radio programmes are heard on more than 61 English-speaking and 67 Spanish-speaking radio stations in 112 countries.

Evaluation activities

29. The activities related to the commemorative events were evaluated by the Department as part of its annual programme impact review for 2008, an assessment of the effectiveness of its educational outreach strategy in increasing awareness of and educating present and future generations about the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. Events targeted at civil society for the International Day were considered to have been both useful and informative. The briefing and panel discussion organized in New York for representatives of non-governmental organizations was considered useful by 99 per cent of the participants, with an average usefulness rate of 4.8 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 was the most positive rating, and the level of information disseminated was rated 4.9 out of 5. The student event was given an overall rating of 4.2 out of 5, and was considered informative by 83 per cent of the surveyed participants. Three-quarters of the participants reported that they wished to learn more about the issue. According to preliminary results of a Departmental assessment, the commemorative activities generated 71 articles in the press.

VI. Future activities

30. In the coming year, the Department will focus on further enhancing its educational outreach programme, which will include dissemination of the UNESCO documentary "The Slave Route: A Global Vision" and the development of educational materials to facilitate the use of the film in schools and institutions around the world.

31. The Department will continue to work with Member States and to expand its partnerships with civil society organizations to encourage the holding of events around the world to commemorate the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and recount the contributions of enslaved Africans. It will expand its multimedia educational outreach targeted at students at all levels and civil society groups, to encourage the study of the historical impact and legacy of slavery and the slave trade, especially in the interactions between the peoples of Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe.

32. The outreach programme will seek to increase the number of schools that incorporate the study of slavery and the slave trade by making educational material available in multiple platforms. It will continue to devise innovative means and methods by which this mandate can be realized and to mobilize activities that reinforce and strengthen the momentum and the level of public awareness generated over the past decade.

33. The Department will continue to seek and to build relationships with partners and to widen the range of activities offered under the programme as options for sponsorships and co-sponsorships arise. It will work to integrate the history of and the lessons learned from the transatlantic slave trade into its many activities, which are intended to build and expand communities of understanding and to promote the unlearning of intolerance. The Department is aware of how critical this mission is at the present time, when the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights is being observed in a world where its provisions are far from universally enjoyed.

34. The Secretary-General has noted that today, over two hundred years after the banning of the slave trade by Denmark, the United States and the United Kingdom, many millions of people are still subjected to similar practices. As he observed at the opening of the exhibit, "Lest We Forget: The Triumph over Slavery", on 1 March, "The victims are typically too scared to speak out. For all that has been accomplished in our campaign for human rights, we still have much to do". The Department of Public Information pledges, through its programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade, to continue to contribute to that mission.